SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES ?

and Other One-Act Plays

J. M. BARRIE

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THE UNIFORM EDITION OF
THE PLAYS OF J. M. BARRIE

SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES?

THE PLAYS OF

J. M. BARRIE

SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES?

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FOUR PLAYS

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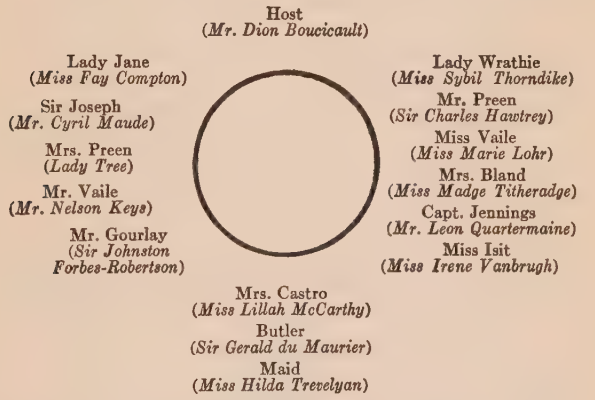
SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES?

SHALL WE JOIN THE LADIES?

For the past week the hospitable Sam Smith has been entertaining a country house party, and we choose to raise the curtain on them towards the end of dinner. They are seated thus, the host facing us:



Smith is a little old bachelor, and sits there beaming on his guests like an elderly cupid. So they

This is the first act of an unfinished play originally produced at the opening of the Royal Dramatic Academy's Theatre, which accounts for the brilliancy of the cast, and the brilliancy of the cast excuses the proud author for giving it in full.

think him, but they are to be undeceived. Though many of them have not met until this week, they have at present that genial regard for each other which steals so becomingly over really nice people who have eaten too much.

Dolphin, the butler, is passing round the fruit. The only other attendant is a maid in the background, as for an emergency, and she is as interested in the conversation as he is indifferent to it. If one of the guests were to destroy himself, Dolphin would merely sign to her to remove the debris while he continued to serve the fruit.

In the midst of hilarity over some quip that we are just too late to catch, the youthful Lady Jane counts the company and is appalled.

LADY JANE. We are thirteen, Lady Wrathie.

(*Many fingers count.*)

LADY WRATHIE. Fourteen.

CAPT. JENNINGS. Twelve.

LADY JANE. We are thirteen.

HOST. Oh dear, how careless of me. Is there anything I can do?

SIR JOSEPH (*of the city*). Leave this to me. All keep your seats.

MRS. PREEN (*perhaps rather thankfully*). I am afraid Lady Jane has risen.

(LADY JANE *subsides.*)

LADY WRATHIE. Joseph, you have risen yourself.

(SIR JOSEPH *subsides.*)

MRS. CASTRO (*a mysterious widow from Buenos Ayres*). Were we thirteen all those other nights?

MRS. PREEN. We always had a guest or two from outside, you remember.

MISS ISIT (*whose name obviously needs to be queried*). All we have got to do is to make our number fourteen.

VAILE. But how, Miss Isit?

MISS ISIT. Why, Dolphin, of course.

MRS. PREEN. It's too clever of you, Miss Isit. Mr. Smith, Dolphin may sit down with us, mayn't he?

MRS. CASTRO. Please, dear Mr. Smith; just for a moment. That breaks the spell.

SIR JOSEPH. We won't eat you, Dolphin. (*But he has crunched some similar ones.*)

HOST. Let me explain to him. You see, Dolphin, there is a superstition that if thirteen

people sit down at table something staggering will happen to one of them before the night is out. That is it, isn't it?

MRS. BLAND (*darkly*). Namely, death.

HOST (*brightly*). Yes, namely, death.

LADY JANE. But not before the night is out, you dear; before the year is out.

HOST. I thought it was before the night is out.

(DOLPHIN *is reluctant.*)

GOURLAY. Sit here, Dolphin.

MISS VAILE. No, I want him.

MISS ISIT. It was my idea, and I insist on having him.

MRS. CASTRO (*moving farther to the left*). Yes, here between us.

(DOLPHIN *obliges.*)

MRS. PREEN (*with childish abandon*). Saved.

HOST. As we are saved, and he does not seem happy, may he resume his duties?

LADY WRATHIE. Yes, yes; and now we ladies may withdraw.

PREEN (*the most selfish of the company, and therefore perhaps the favourite*). First, a glass of wine with you, Dolphin.

VAILE (*ever seeking to undermine* PREEN'S *popularity*). Is this wise?

PREEN (*determined to carry the thing through despite this fellow*). To the health of our friend Dolphin.

(DOLPHIN'S *health having been drunk, he withdraws his chair and returns to the sideboard. As* MISS ISIT *and* MRS. CASTRO *had made room for him between them exactly opposite his master, and the space remains empty, we have now a better view of the company. Can this have been the author's object?*)

SIR JOSEPH (*pleasantly detaining the ladies*). One moment. Another toast. Fellow-guests, to-morrow morning, alas, this party has to break up, and I am sure you will all agree with me that we have had a delightful week. It has not been an eventful week; it has been too happy for that.

CAPT. JENNINGS. I rise to protest. When I came here a week ago I had never met Lady Jane. Now, as you know, we are engaged. I certainly call it an eventful week.

LADY JANE. Yes, please, Sir Joseph.

SIR JOSEPH. I stand corrected. And now we are in the last evening of it; we are drawing nigh to the end of a perfect day.

PREEN (*who is also an orator*). In seconding this motion——

VAILE. Pooh. (*He is the perfect little gentleman, if socks and spats can do it.*)

SIR JOSEPH. Though I have known you intimately for but a short time, I already find it impossible to call you anything but Sam Smith.

MRS. CASTRO. In our hearts, Mr. Smith, that is what we ladies call you also.

PREEN. If I might say a word——

VAILE. Tuts.

SIR JOSEPH. Ladies and gentlemen, is he not like a pocket edition of Mr. Pickwick?

GOURLAY (*an artist*). Exactly. That is how I should like to paint him.

MRS. BLAND. Mr. Smith, you love, we think that if you were married you could not be quite so nice.

SIR JOSEPH. At any rate, he could not be

quite so simple. For you are a very simple soul, Sam Smith. Well, we esteem you the more for your simplicity. Friends all, I give you the toast of Sam Smith.

(*The toast is drunk with acclamation, and* DOLPHIN, *who has paid no attention to it, again hovers round with wine.*)

HOST (*rising in answer to their appeals and warming them with his Pickwickian smile*). Ladies and gentlemen, you are very kind, and I don't pretend that it isn't pleasant to me to be praised. Tell me, have you ever wondered why I invited you here?

MISS ISIT. Because you like us, of course, you muddle-headed darling.

HOST. Was that the reason?

SIR JOSEPH. Take care, Sammy, you are not saying what you mean.

HOST. Am I not? Kindly excuse. I dare say I am as simple as Sir Joseph says. And yet, do you really know me? Does any person ever know another absolutely? Has not the simplest of us a secret drawer inside him with—with a lock to it?

MISS ISIT. If you have, Mr. Smith, be a dear and open it to us.

MRS. CASTRO. How delicious. He is going to tell us of his first and only love.

HOST. Ah, Mrs. Castro, I think I had one once, very nice, but I have forgotten her name. The person I loved best was my brother.

PREEN. I never knew you had a brother.

HOST. I suppose none of you knew. He died two years ago.

SIR JOSEPH. Sorry, Sam Smith.

MRS. PREEN (*drawing the chocolates nearer her*). We should like to hear about him if it isn't too sad.

HOST. Would you? He was many years my junior, and as attractive as I am commonplace. He died in a foreign land. Natural causes were certified. But there were suspicious circumstances, and I went out there determined to probe the matter to the full. I did, too.

PREEN. You didn't say where the place was.

HOST. It was Monte Carlo.

(*He pauses here, as if to give time for some-*

thing to happen, but nothing does happen except that MISS ISIT'S *wine-glass slips from her hand to the floor.*)

Dolphin, another glass for Miss Isit.

LADY JANE. Do go on.

HOST. My inquiries were slow, but I became convinced that my brother had been poisoned.

MRS. BLAND. How dreadful. You poor man.

GOURLAY. I hope, Sam Smith, that you got on the track of the criminals?

HOST. Oh yes.

(*A chair creaks.*)

Did you speak, Miss Isit?

MISS ISIT. Did I? I think not. What did you say about the criminals?

HOST. Not criminals; there was only one.

PREEN. Man or woman?

HOST. We are not yet certain. What we do know is that my brother was visited in his rooms that night by some one who must have been the murderer. It was some one who spoke English and who was certainly dressed as a man, but it may have been a woman. There is proof that it was some one who had

been to the tables that night. I got in touch with every 'possible,' though I had to follow some of them to distant parts.

LADY WRATHIE. It is extraordinarily interesting.

HOST. Outwardly many of them seemed to be quite respectable people.

SIR JOSEPH. Ah, one can't go by that, Sam Smith.

HOST. I didn't. I made the most exhaustive inquiries into their private lives. I did it so cunningly that not one of them suspected why I was so anxious to make his or her acquaintance; and then, when I was ready for them, I invited them to my house for a week, and they are all sitting round my table this evening.

(*As the monstrous significance of this sinks into them, there is a hubbub at the table.*)

You wanted to know why I had asked you here, and I am afraid that in consequence I have wandered a little from the toast; but I thank you, Sir Joseph, I thank you all, for the too kind way in which you have drunk my health.

(*He sits down as modestly as he had risen,*

but the smile has gone from his face; and the curious—which includes all the diners—may note that he is licking his lips. In the babel that again breaks forth, DOLPHIN, *who has remained stationary and vacuous for the speech, goes the round of the table refilling glasses.*)

PREEN (*the first to be wholly articulate*). In the name of every one of us, Mr. Smith, I tell you that this is an outrage.

HOST. I was afraid you wouldn't like it.

SIR JOSEPH. May I ask, sir, whether all this week you have been surreptitiously ferreting into our private affairs, perhaps even rummaging our trunks?

HOST (*brightening*). That was it. You remember how I pressed you all to show your prowess on the tennis courts and the golf links while I stayed at home? That was my time for the trunks.

LADY JANE. Was there ever such a man? Did you—open our letters?

HOST. Every one of them. And there were some very queer things in them. There was

one about a luncheon at the Ritz. 'You will know me,' the man wrote, 'by the gardenia I shall carry in my hand.' Perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned that. But the lady who got that letter need not be frightened. She is married, and her husband is here with her, but I won't tell you any more.

MISS ISIT. I think he should be compelled to tell.

PREEN. Wrathie, there are only two ladies here with their husbands.

SIR JOSEPH. Yours and mine, Preen.

LADY WRATHIE. Joseph, I don't need to tell you it wasn't your wife.

MRS. PREEN. It certainly wasn't yours, Willie.

PREEN. Of that I am well assured.

SIR JOSEPH. Take care what you say, Preen, That is very like a reflection on my wife.

GOURLAY. Let that pass. The other is the serious thing—so serious that it is a nightmare. Whom do you accuse of doing away with your brother, sir? Out with it.

HOST. You are not all turning against me,

are you? I assure you I don't accuse any of you yet. I know that one of you did it, but I am not sure which one. I shall know soon.

VAILE. Soon? How soon?

HOST. Soon after the men join the ladies to-night. I ought to tell you that I am to try a little experiment to-night, something I have thought out which I have every confidence will make the guilty person fall into my hands like a ripe plum. (*He indicates rather horribly how he will squeeze it.*)

LADY JANE (*hitting his hand*). Don't do that.

SIR JOSEPH (*voicing the general unrest*). We insist, Smith, on hearing what this experiment is to be.

HOST. That would spoil it. But I can tell you this. My speech had a little pit in it, and all the time I was talking I was watching whether any of you would fall into that pit.

MRS. PREEN (*rising*). I didn't notice any pit.

HOST. You weren't meant to, Mrs. Preen.

PREEN. May I ask, without pressing the personal note, did any one fall into your pit?

HOST. I think so.

CAPT. JENNINGS. Smith, we must have the name of this person.

LADY WRATHIE. Mrs. Preen has fainted.

(PREEN *hurries slowly to his wife's assistance, and there is some commotion.*)

MRS. PREEN. Why—what—who—I am all right now. Willie, go back to your seat. Why are you all staring at me so?

MISS ISIT. Dear Mrs. Preen, we are so glad that you are better. I wonder what upset you?

PREEN (*imprudently*). I never knew her faint before.

MISS ISIT. I expect it was the heat.

PREEN (*nervous*). Say it was the heat, Emily.

MRS. PREEN. No, it wasn't the heat, Miss Isit. It was Mr. Smith's talk of a pit.

PREEN. My dear.

MRS. PREEN. I suddenly remembered how, as soon as that man mentioned that the place of the crime was Monte Carlo, some lady had let her wine-glass fall. That was why I fainted. I can't remember who she was.

LADY WRATHIE. It was Miss Isit.

MRS. PREEN. Really?

MISS ISIT. There is a thing called the law of libel. If Lady Wrathie and Mrs. Preen will kindly formulate their charges——

GOURLAY. Oh, come, let us keep our heads.

HOST. That's what I say.

GOURLAY. What about a motive? Scotland Yard always seeks for that first.

HOST. I see two possible motives. If a woman did it—well, they tended to run after my brother, and you all know of what a woman scorned is capable.

PREEN (*reminiscent*). Rather.

HOST. Then, again, my brother had a large sum of money with him, which disappeared.

SIR JOSEPH. If you could trace that money it might be a help.

HOST. All sorts of things are a help. The way you are all pretending to know nothing about the matter is a help. It might be a help if I could find out which of you has a clammy hand that at this moment wants to creep beneath the table.

(*Not a hand creeps.*)

I'll tell you something more. Murderers' hearts beat differently from other hearts. (*He raises his finger.*) Listen.

(*They listen.*)

Whose was it?

(*A cry from* MISS VAILE *brings her into undesired prominence.*)

MISS VAILE (*explaining*). I thought I heard it. It seemed to come from across the table.

(*This does not give universal satisfaction.*) Please don't think because this man made me scream that I did it. I never was on a yacht in my life, at Monte Carlo or anywhere else.

(*Nor does even this have the desired effect.*)

VAILE (*sharply*). Bella!

MISS VAILE. Have I said—anything odd?

GOURLAY. A yacht? There has been no talk about a yacht.

MISS VAILE (*shrinking*). Hasn't there?

HOST. Perhaps there should have been. It was on his yacht that my brother died.

MRS. CASTRO. You said in his rooms.

HOST. Yes, that is what I said. I wanted to find out which of you knew better.

LADY JANE. And Miss Vaile——

MISS VAILE. I can explain it all if—if——

MISS ISIT. Yes, give her a little time.

HOST. Perhaps you would all like to take a few minutes.

MISS VAILE. I admit that I was at Monte Carlo—with my brother—when an Englishman died there rather mysteriously on a yacht. When Mr. Smith told us of his brother's death, I concluded that it was probably the same person.

VAILE. I presume that you accept my sister's statement?

MISS ISIT. Ab-sol-ute-ly.

HOST. She is not the only one of you who knew that yacht. You all admit having been at Monte Carlo two years ago, I suppose?

CAPT. JENNINGS. One of us wasn't. Lady Jane was never there.

HOST (*with beady eyes*). What do you say to that, Lady Jane?

(LADY JANE *falters.*)

CAPT. JENNINGS. Tell him, Jane.

HOST. Yes, tell me.

CAPT. JENNINGS. You never were there; say so.

LADY JANE. Why shouldn't I have been there?

CAPT. JENNINGS. No reason. But when I happened to mention Monte Carlo to you the other day I certainly understood—— Jane, I never forget a word you say, and you did say you had never been there.

LADY JANE. So you—you, Jack—you accuse me—you—me——

CAPT. JENNINGS. I haven't, I haven't.

LADY JANE. You have all heard that Captain Jennings and I are engaged. I want you to understand that we are so no longer.

CAPT. JENNINGS. Jane!

(She removes the engagement ring from her finger and hesitates how to transfer it to the donor, who is many seats apart from her. The ever-resourceful DOLPHIN *goes to her with a tray on which she deposits the ring, and it is thus conveyed to the unhappy* JENNINGS. *Next moment* DOLPHIN *has to attend to the maid, who makes an audible*

gurgle of sympathy with love, which is a breach of etiquette. He opens the door for her, and she makes a shameful exit. He then fills the Captain's glass.)

HOST (*in one of his nicer moods*). Take comfort, Captain. If Lady Jane should prove to be the person wanted—mind you, perhaps she isn't—why, then the ring is a matter of small importance, because you would be parted in any case. I mean by the handcuffs. I forgot to say that I have them here. (*He gropes at his feet, where other people merely have a table-napkin.*) Pass them round, Dolphin. Perhaps some of you have never seen them before.

PREEN. A pocket edition of Pickwick we called him; he is more like a pocket edition of the devil.

HOST. Please, a little courtesy. After all, I am your host.

(DOLPHIN *goes the round of the table with the handcuffs on the tray that a moment ago contained a lover's ring. They meet with no success.*)

Do take a look at them, Mrs. Castro; they are

an adjustable pair in case they should be needed for small wrists. Would you like to try them on, Sir Joseph? They close with a click—a click.

SIR JOSEPH (*pettishly*). We quite understand.

(MRS. BLAND *rises.*)

MRS. BLAND. How stupid of us. We have all forgotten that he said the murderer may have been a woman in man's clothes, and I have just remembered that when we played the charade on Wednesday he wanted the ladies to dress up as men. Was it to see whether one of us looked as if she could have passed for a man that night at Monte Carlo?

HOST. You've got it, Mrs. Bland.

SIR JOSEPH. Well, none of you did dress up, at any rate.

MRS. BLAND (*distressed*). Oh, Sir Joseph. Some of us did dress up, in private, and we all agreed that—of course there's nothing in it, but we all agreed that the only figure which might have deceived a careless eye was Lady Wrathie's.

PREEN. I say!

LADY WRATHIE. Joseph, do you sit there and permit this?

HOST. Now, now, there is nothing to be touchy about. Have I not been considerate?

SIR JOSEPH. Smith, I hold you to be an impudent scoundrel.

HOST. May not I, who lost a brother in circumstances so painful, appeal for a little kindly consideration from those of you who are innocent—shady characters though you be?

PREEN. I must say that rather touches me. Some of us might have reasons for being reluctant to have our past at Monte inquired into without being the person you are asking for.

HOST. Precisely. I am presuming that to be the position of eleven of you.

LADY WRATHIE. Joseph, I must ask you to come upstairs with me to pack our things.

MISS ISIT. For my part, after poor Mr. Smith's appeal I think it would be rather heartless not to stay and see the thing out. Especially, Mr. Smith, if you would give us just an inkling of what your—little experiment —in the drawing-room—is to be?

HOST. I can't say anything about it except

that it isn't to take place in the drawing-room. You ladies are to go this evening to Dolphin's room, where we shall join you presently.

(*Even* DOLPHIN *is taken aback.*)

MRS. PREEN. Why should we go there?

HOST. Because I tell you to, Mrs. Preen.

LADY WRATHIE. I go to no such room. I leave this house at once.

MRS. PREEN. I also.

LADY JANE. All of us. I want to go home.

LADY WRATHIE. Joseph, come.

MRS. PREEN. Willie, I am ready. I wish you a long good-bye, Mr. Smith.

(*Their dignified advance upon the door is spoilt on opening it by their finding a policeman* (*Mr. Norman Forbes*) *standing there. They glare at* MR. SMITH.)

HOST. The ladies will now adjourn to Dolphin's room.

LADY WRATHIE. I say no.

MRS. CASTRO. Let us. Why shouldn't the innocent ones help him?

(*She gives* SMITH *her hand with a disarming smile.*)

HOST. I knew you would be on my side, Mrs. Castro. Cold hand—warm heart. That is the saying, isn't it?

(*She shrinks.*)

LADY WRATHIE. Those who wish to leave this man's house, follow me.

HOST (*for her special benefit*). My brother's cigarette case was of faded green leather, and a hole had been burned in the back of it.

(*For some reason this takes the fight out of her, and she departs for* DOLPHIN'S *room, tossing her head, and followed by the other ladies.*)

VAILE (*seeing* SMITH *drop a word to* MISS VAILE *as she goes*). What did you say to my sister?

HOST. I only said to her that she isn't your sister. (*The last lady to go is* MISS ISIT.) So you never met my brother, Miss Isit?

MISS ISIT. Not that I know of, Mr. Smith.

HOST. I have a photograph of him that I should like to show you.

MISS ISIT. I don't care to see it.

HOST. You are going to see it. (*It is in*

his pocket, and he suddenly puts it before her eyes.)

MISS ISIT (*surprised*). That is not—— (*She checks herself.*)

HOST. No, that is not my brother. That is some one you have never seen. But how did you know it wasn't my brother?

(*She makes no answer.*)

I rather think you knew Dick, Miss Isit.

MISS ISIT (*dropping him a curtsey*). I rather think I did, Mr. Sam. What then?

(*She goes impudently. Now that the ladies have left the room, the men don't quite know what to do except stare at their little host. Decanter in one hand and a box of cigarettes in the other, he toddles down to what would have been the hostess's chair had there been a hostess.*)

HOST. Draw up closer, won't you?

(*They don't want to, but they do, with the exception of* VAILE, *who is studying a picture very near the door.*)

You are not leaving us, Vaile?

VAILE. I thought——

HOST (*sharply*). Sit down.

VAILE. Oh, quite.

HOST. You are not drinking anything, Gourlay. Captain, the port is with you.

(*The wine revolves, but no one partakes.*)

PREEN (*heavily*). Smith, there are a few words that I think it my duty to say. This is a very unusual situation.

HOST. Yes. You'll have a cigarette, Preen?

(*The cigarettes are passed round and share the fate of the wine.*)

GOURLAY. I wonder why Mrs. Bland—she is the only one of them that there seems to be nothing against.

VAILE. A bit fishy, that.

PREEN (*murmuring*). It was rather odd my wife fainting.

CAPT. JENNINGS (*who has been a drooping figure since a recent incident*). I dare say the ladies are saying the same sort of thing about us. (*He lights a cigarette—one of his own.* DOLPHIN *is offering them liqueurs.*)

PREEN (*sulkily*). No, thanks. (*But he takes one.*) Smith, I am sure I speak for all of us when

I say we would esteem it a favour if you ask Dolphin to withdraw.

HOST. He has his duties.

GOURLAY (*pettishly, to* DOLPHIN). No, thanks. He gets on my nerves. Can nothing disturb this man?

CAPT. JENNINGS (*also refusing*). No, thanks. Evidently nothing.

SIR JOSEPH (*reverting to a more hopeful subject*). Everything seems to point to its being a woman—wouldn't you say, Smith?

HOST. I wouldn't say everything, Sir Joseph. Dolphin thinks it was a man.

SIR JOSEPH. One of us here?

(SMITH *nods, and they survey their friend* DOLPHIN *with renewed distaste.*)

GOURLAY. Did he know your brother?

HOST. He was my brother's servant out there.

VAILE (*rising*). What? He wasn't the fellow who——?

HOST. Who what, Vaile?

PREEN. I say!

VAILE (*hotly*). What do you say?

PREEN. Nothing (*doggedly*). But I say!

(*Though* DOLPHIN *is now a centre of interest, no one seems able to address him personally.*)

GOURLAY. Are we to understand that you have had Dolphin spying on us here?

HOST. That was the idea. And he helped me by taking your finger-prints.

VAILE. How can that help?

HOST. He sent them to Scotland Yard.

SIR JOSEPH (*vindictively*). Oh, he did, did he?

PREEN. What shows finger-marks best?

HOST. Glass, I believe.

PREEN (*putting down his glass*). Now I see why the Americans went dry.

SIR JOSEPH. Smith, how can you be sure that Dolphin wasn't the man himself?

(MR. SMITH *makes no answer.* DOLPHIN *picks up* SIR JOSEPH'S *napkin and returns it to him.*)

PREEN. Somehow I still cling to the hope that it was a woman.

VAILE. If it is a woman, Smith, what will you do?

HOST. She shall hang by the neck until

she is dead. You won't try the benedictine, Vaile?

VAILE. No, thanks.

(*The maid returns with coffee, which she presents under* DOLPHIN'S *superintendence. Most of them accept. The cups are already full.*)

SIR JOSEPH (*in his lighter manner*). Did you notice what the ladies are doing in Dolphin's room, Lucy?

MAID (*in a tremble, and wishing she could fly from this house*). Yes, Sir Joseph, they are wondering, Sir Joseph, which of you it was that did it.

PREEN. How like women!

GOURLAY. By the way, Smith, do you know how the poison was administered?

HOST. Yes, in coffee. (*He is about to help himself.*)

MAID. You are to take the yellow cup, sir.

HOST. Who said so?

MAID. The lady who poured out this evening, sir.

PREEN. Aha, who was she?

MAID. Lady Jane Wraye, sir.

PREEN. I don't like it.

GOURLAY. Smith, don't drink that coffee.

CAPT. JENNINGS (*in wrath*). Why shouldn't he drink it?

GOURLAY. Well, if it was she—a desperate woman—it was given in coffee the other time, remember. But stop, she wouldn't be likely to do it in the same way a second time.

VAILE. I'm not so sure. Perhaps she doesn't suspect that Smith knows how it was given the first time. We didn't know till the ladies had left the room.

PREEN (*admiring him at last*). I say, Vaile, that's good.

CAPT. JENNINGS. I have no doubt she merely meant that she had sugared it to his taste.

VAILE (*smiling*). Sugar!

PREEN (*pinning his faith to* VAILE). Sugar!

GOURLAY. Couldn't we analyse it?

CAPT. JENNINGS (*the one who is at present looking most like a murderer*). Smith, I insist on your drinking that coffee.

VAILE. Lady Jane! Who would have thought it!

PREEN (*become a mere echo of* VAILE). Lady Jane! Who would have thought it!

CAPT. JENNINGS. Give me the yellow cup. (*He drains it to the dregs.*)

SIR JOSEPH. Nobly done, in any case. Look here, Jennings—you are among friends—it hadn't an odd taste, had it?

CAPT. JENNINGS. Not a bit.

VAILE. He wouldn't feel the effects yet.

PREEN. He wouldn't feel them yet.

HOST. Vaile ought to know.

PREEN. Vaile knows.

SIR JOSEPH. Why ought Vaile to know, Smith?

HOST. He used to practise as a doctor.

SIR JOSEPH. You never mentioned that to me, Vaile.

VAILE. Why should I?

HOST. Why should he? He is not allowed to practise now.

(*We now see that* VAILE *has unpleasant teeth.*)

PREEN. A doctor—poison—ease of access. (*His passion for* VAILE *is shattered. He gives him back the ring, as* CAPT. JENNINGS *might say, and wanders the room despondently.*)

SIR JOSEPH. We are where we were again.

(DOLPHIN *escorts out the maid, who is not in a condition to go alone.*)

CAPT. JENNINGS. At any rate that fellow has gone.

GOURLAY (*the first to laugh for some time*). Excuse me. I suddenly remembered that Wrathie had called this the end of a perfect day.

HOST. It isn't ended yet.

(MR. PREEN *in his wanderings toward the sideboard encounters a very large glass and a small bottle of brandy. He introduces them to each other. He swirls the contents in the glass as if hopeful that it may climb the rim and so escape without his having to drink it. This is a trick which has become so common with him that when lost in thought he sometimes goes through the motion though there is no glass in his hand.*)

PREEN (*communing with himself*). I feel I am not my old bright self. (*Sips.*) I can't believe for a moment that it was my wife. (*Sips.*) And yet—(*sips*)—that fainting, you know. (*Sips.*) I should go away for a bit until it blew over. (*Sips.*) I don't think I should ever marry again. (*Sips and sips, and becomes perhaps a little more like his old bright self.*)

GOURLAY. There is something shocking about sitting here, suspecting each other in this way. Let us go to that room and have it out.

HOST. I am quite ready. Nothing more to drink, anyone? Bring your cigarette, Captain.

SIR JOSEPH (*hoarsely*). Smith—Sam—before we go, can I have a word with you alone?

HOST. Sorry, Joseph. And now, shall we join the ladies?

(*As they rise, a dreadful scream is heard from the direction of* DOLPHIN'S *room—a woman's scream. Next moment* DOLPHIN *reappears in the doorway. He is no longer the imperturbable butler. He is livid. He tries to speak, but no words will come out of his mouth.* CAPT. JENNINGS *dashes past*

him, and the others follow. DOLPHIN *looks at his master with mingled horror and appeal, and then goes.* SMITH *sits down again to take one glass of brandy. Where he sits we cannot see his face, but his rigid little back is merciless. As he rises to follow the others the curtain falls on Act One.*)

HALF AN HOUR

HALF AN HOUR

Mr. Garson, who is a financier, and his young wife, the lovely Lady Lilian, are in their mansion near Park Lane, but they are not at home this evening to the public eye; they are in the midst of a brawl which, it may be hoped, does not show them at their best. There is such a stirring time before them, and only half an hour for it, that we must not keep them waiting. Indeed they have so much to do that we challenge them to do it.

LADY LILIAN (*a frozen flower*). Why don't you strike me, Richard? I am a woman, and there is no one within call.

GARSON. A woman! You useless thing, that is just what you are not.

(*It is evidently his honest if mistaken opinion, and he pushes her from him so roughly that she lies on the couch as she fell, in a touching but perhaps rather impertinent little heap.*)

LILIAN (*who, though a dear woman to some,*

has a genius for putting her finger on the raw of those she does not favour). How strong you are, husband mine! No wonder I love you! Now as I have told you why I love you, won't you tell me why you love me?

(*He fumes inarticulately while she takes off her hat and coat, perhaps in search of that homey feeling.*)

How you have ruffled me! (*She considers her frock.*) You know, I can't make up my mind whether green is really my colour. What do you think? Which colour do you like best to knock me about in, Richard?

GARSON (*with his fists clenched though they are not upraised*). You take care!

LILIAN (*as he stamps the floor*). Do you mind telling me what all this scene has been about?

GARSON. You have me there. But how does it matter what it is that sets a pair like you and me saying what we think of each other?

LILIAN. True. But we knew what we thought of each other before.

GARSON. We did. And I've said to that father of yours——

LILIAN. By the way, I never heard how much you paid Pops for me?

GARSON. One way or another, a good twenty thousand.

LILIAN. I can't help feeling proud.

GARSON. If I could have got you for half I wouldn't have had you.

LILIAN. How like you to say that, Richard! Still, there are other pretties for whom you could have had the satisfaction of paying more. There must have been some—dear reason—why you flung the handkerchief to me?

GARSON. Your rotten old families, all so poor and so well turned out. The come-on look in the melting eyes of you, and the disdain of you. I suppose they went to my head. You were the worst, so I chose you.

LILIAN (*clapping her hands*). I won!

GARSON. Oh, you didn't need to come to me unless you liked.

LILIAN (*shivering*). I admit that. It was your money that brought me.

GARSON. Quite so.

LILIAN (*with a sincerity that makes us hopeful of her*). I'm sorry, Richard, for both of us.

GARSON. Pooh!

LILIAN. You must at least allow that I never pretended it was anything but your wealth that drew me.

GARSON. I never wanted it to be anything else.

LILIAN. How like you again! Perhaps that is even some little excuse—though not very much—for me.

GARSON (*sneering*). Soft sawder!

LILIAN. I dare say. (*Surveying the man with curiosity*) Why don't we end it?

GARSON (*bellowing*). Do you know whom you are talking to? With my name in the City——

LILIAN. Of course. But if you won't, Richard, has it never struck you that some day I——

GARSON (*grinning*). Never!

LILIAN. You have a mighty faith in me.

GARSON. Mighty.

LILIAN. May I ask why?

(*He comes to her and taps her bodice.*)

GARSON. In this expensive little breast you know why. (*In case there should be any misunderstanding he slaps his pocket.*)

LILIAN. I see.

GARSON. Tragic lot yours, isn't it?

LILIAN. More tragic than you understand.

GARSON. Bought when you were too young to know what you were doing!

LILIAN. Not so young but that I should have known.

GARSON. Such a rare exquisite creature, too, as you know yourself to be.

LILIAN (*with abnegation*). As I know I am not. But as I long to be. As I think I could be.

GARSON. As you think you could be, had you married a better man.

LILIAN. Mock me, you have some right, but it may be truer than you think.

GARSON. It is what they tell you, I don't doubt.

LILIAN. Who tell me?

GARSON. The live-on-papa cubs.

LILIAN (*shrugging her shoulders*). If I were

to let them tell me what they would like to say——

GARSON (*possibly with some penetration*). You do, my pet, and when they have finished you tell them they mustn't say it; and your lip trembles, and one sad tear sits on your sweet eyes, the same little tear that comes when you have overdrawn your bank account.

LILIAN. How you read me!

GARSON. I think so. I think I know the stuff you are made of. I wouldn't try heroics, Lilian; you can't live up to them.

LILIAN. I haven't the courage, I suppose?

GARSON. You have the pluck that let the French Jack-a-dandies go tripping to the guillotine; and perhaps my breed hasn't. But when it comes to living you've got to live on us, my girl.

LILIAN (*rising and facing him*). Oh, if—if——

GARSON. If—if you were to show me! I am not nervous. In the end you will always be true to Number One. I have thought you out.

LILIAN (*on fire*). If I did?

GARSON. If you did—if you tried to play any game on me——

(*He takes grip of her by the wrist.*)

LILIAN (*in her earlier manner*). Would it be the knife, Richard, or Desdemona's pillow?

GARSON. If you brought any shame on me, before I put you to the door I would—I would break you!

LILIAN. If I did it I wouldn't be here to break.

GARSON. By the powers, it would be as well for you.

LILIAN. Unless you wish to do the breaking now, please let go my wrist.

(*He throws it from him, and their colloquy ends with these terrible words:*)

GARSON. Dinner at half-past, I suppose?

LILIAN. I suppose so.

(*When she is alone we see some great resolution struggling into life in her and adorning her. It means among other things, we may conclude, that she does not purpose joining him at dinner. She writes a brief letter, puts her wedding-ring in the*

envelope and deposits the explosive in the nearest drawer of his desk. On top of it she throws all the jewellery she is wearing and closes the drawer. She puts on her hat and coat, and after a last look in a glass at the face she is leaving behind her—the only face of her that GARSON *knows—she leaves his house.*

Two hundred yards away is a mews, where odd brainy people—afterwards sorry for themselves—have here and there made romantic homes, all tiny but not all over the garages that have supplanted stables. This one where HUGH PATON *lodges is a complete house, and we find him in a snug room, though it is only reached by a brief ladder which he frequently jumps. At present the room is in disorder, the fire extinguished by the masses of paper he has dumped on it, and he himself is tousled and in disarray. He has not quite finished an extensive packing, and has reached the point of wondering whether he should reopen that*

bulging bag to put those old football boots in it, or leave them for the good of the house. He is whistling gaily, with broken intervals in which his pipe is in his mouth, and he has a very honest face.

To him enters with a rush the little daughter of the house, whose heart he has won by lifting his hat to her in the mews. She has walked with more dignity ever since, and she is twelve.)

SUSIE. You will be stamping at me, sir, but there is a lady, and though I told her you were just putting on your muffler to start for Egypt, up she would come.

(*Up she does come, and she is* LILIAN. *When* SUSIE *sees how these two look at each other she knows all, and indeed more, and out of respect for Love she goes down the ladder on her tiptoes.*)

HUGH (*surprised, but with outstretched arms*). You! Oh, my dear!

(*She will not let him embrace her yet.*)

LILIAN (*the soft-eyed, the tremulous*). No,

Hugh. Please listen to me first. You see I have changed my mind, and come after all. Yes, I am here to go with you, if you will have me still. But oh, my Hugh, let there be no mistake. Don't have me, dear, if you would rather—rather not.

(*He clasps her to him, and of course she was sure he would.*)

It isn't really a shock to you, is it? Hugh, you don't despise me in your heart for coming?

HUGH. Dear, my dear!

LILIAN (*merely playing with the idea*). You are so fond of Egypt—perhaps it would be lovelier for you to go back to it alone.

(*We are sorry she says this, for she has put it into our own heads. They are about the same age, but as they sit there on one of his trunks he looks younger.*)

HUGH (*who is far from agreeing with us*). Egypt, without you? Horrible!

LILIAN. Was it seeming horrible before I came up the ladder?

HUGH (*abashed*). Inconceivable if it wasn't.

LILIAN. You were able to smoke.

HUGH. Mechanically. (*He remembers guiltily that he was even whistling.*) Lilian, that man packing wasn't me. I only began to be again when you lit up the doorway. Tell me, what made you change your mind so suddenly?

LILIAN. Not suddenly. I longed to go to you, but I was his wife. Hugh, did you hear me say I *was* his wife? What a lovely way of putting it!

HUGH. My wife now and always.

LILIAN. The things he said to-night!

HUGH. There, there, that is all over. You wrote the letter?

LILIAN. Yes, and left it for him.

HUGH. You said in it that it was to me you were coming? I asked that of you because I want it all to be above-board. I am not afraid of him.

LILIAN. Yes, I said in it that I was going away with you, and I put his wedding-ring inside it. I have burned all my boats. Oh, Hugh, if it had turned out that you would rather not!

HUGH. A nice sort of gent I'd be.

LILIAN. He thinks me a rotten, shallow creature. No, don't interrupt. Perhaps I was so with him, dear. What was bad in each of us seemed to call to the other.

HUGH. If yours ever calls to me I won't recognise the voice.

LILIAN. He said that in any test I would always go where my bread was best buttered.

HUGH. He will see his mistake when he finds you have come to me. (*He starts up*) I say! We mustn't be late. Not another word if you love me. Try to make these catches snap, while I sit on the trunk. What are you smiling at?

LILIAN. I have just remembered, Hugh, that there were people coming to dinner to-night!

HUGH (*rising triumphant from his struggle with the trunk*). I have just remembered something more important. (*With accusing finger*) Woman, where is your trousseau?

LILIAN. I have only what you see, my dear. Here is all the riches I bring you—four and sixpence. Please take care of my dowry for me, Hugh!

HUGH. You poor one! But what fun to buy you a trousseau at Brindisi—if not before.

(*He rings.*)

LILIAN (*catching his gaiety*). Are you proposing to send out a servant to get a trousseau for me?

HUGH. What a capital idea! (*As the little maid arrives*) Susie, skip across to the nearest draper's and buy me a trousseau.

SUSIE. A what, sir?

HUGH. I can only give you ten minutes—lots of time—sure to have them in stock—need of the age—all ready in Christmas hampers. (*Looking* LILIAN *over*) Size five and a half by one and a quarter—hurry, old 'un, fly.

SUSIE. Whatever do he mean?

LILIAN. He only means that he wants a taxi.

SUSIE. Oh, that! Mother's gone out, and you know what father is, sir, but I'll get it myself.

HUGH. No, you don't, Susie, not in the rain. Back in a jiffy, Lilian.

(*He is gone, and they hear his boisterous leap of the ladder.*)

SUSIE. He is just bubbling over, and all because he is going off to make dams.

LILIAN (*asking too much*). Has he been bubbling over for long, Susie?

SUSIE (*innocently giving it*). For days and days. I used to think of him out in Egypt in a very dirty state till I saw a picture of him, all in laundry white, and riding on a camel.

LILIAN. The camel goes on its knees to him, Susie.

SUSIE (*heartily*). I don't wonder at it. (*She is on her own knees giving those finishing touches to the baggage which she knows can only come from a woman's hands.*) There was a thing about him in the paper, and it said 'The ball is at his feet.'

LILIAN. And it is. A great career.

SUSIE (*looking sometimes six and sometimes sixty*). For him. But I have just to make ready for another lodger. That is all the great career there is for the likes of me. (*Wistfully*) I'm thinking there is a great career for you.

LILIAN (*smiling*). How, Susie?

SUSIE. Him. (*She rises.*) I wonder would

you let me see it. I have never seen them except in shop windows.

LILIAN. What?

SUSIE. Fine you know. The thing that is on the third finger of your left hand.

LILIAN (*showing a bare finger*). Nothing, you see.

SUSIE (*sharp*). You haven't landed him yet?

(*She is so disappointed that* LILIAN *is kind.*)

LILIAN. All is lovely, Susie.

SUSIE (*who must have it plainer than that*). You've got him?

LILIAN. I've got him.

SUSIE. Lucky you!

LILIAN. Yes, lucky me. You mustn't grudge him to me, Susie. I haven't always been lucky with men.

SUSIE. Men—oh, men! Most men deserves all they gets. (*She screws up her eyes and opens them to explain.*) I was just seeing you and him on your camels.

(*There is a knocking on the outer door.*)

LILIAN. There he is.

SUSIE. I haven't got back his key. (*She*

knows the familiar sounds of the mews.) It's not him. There is something wrong.

LILIAN. Quick, Susie.

(*The child is gone for a moment, and* LILIAN *is conscious of some disturbance in the passage below.*)

SUSIE (*reappearing, terrified*). Oh, miss!

LILIAN. Tell me.

SUSIE. They are carrying him into his bedroom.

LILIAN. Not Mr. Paton? Speak!

SUSIE. It's him! He was run over.

(*She disappears again, but the tramp of feet is heard through the open door. A grave man comes up the ladder. He is wearing an overcoat and muffler and he closes the door.*)

DR. BRODIE. Poor lady! I suppose you——

LILIAN. Tell me!

DR. BRODIE. He was run over by a motor bus. It is very serious.

LILIAN. Tell me!

DR. BRODIE. I must tell you. He is dead.

LILIAN. No, he isn't.

DR. BRODIE. He died as they picked him up.

LILIAN. It isn't true.

DR. BRODIE. A Mr. Paton, they tell me. I don't know him. I am a doctor and I happened to be passing. He only spoke one word.

LILIAN. My name?

DR. BRODIE. The word was Egypt.

LILIAN. He is going there. He had gone out for a taxi. So you see it can't be true.

DR. BRODIE. It is true, alas. (*He gets her into a chair.*) Mrs. Paton, I want to help you in any way possible. There seems to be no one in the house but a very useless man and a child. If you can give me the address of any male relative——

LILIAN (*starting up*). You mustn't bring any one here.

DR. BRODIE. Just to help you with—I don't quite—Excuse me, are you Mrs. Paton? (*The pitiful look she gives him makes him avert his troubled eyes.*) I am sure you will understand that I have no wish to intrude. But some one must communicate with the relatives. And of course an inquiry——

LILIAN. You mean, I have no right to be here?

DR. BRODIE. I don't know whether you have a right or not. But you must know. (*As she shrinks from him*) Pardon me, I won't disturb you any longer.

LILIAN. Don't go. What am I to do?

DR. BRODIE. If it is well for him to have it publicly known that you were here you will of course remain; but if it would not be well for him, my advice to you—as you ask for it, unhappy lady, is to go at once.

LILIAN (*throwing out her arms*). Where am I to go?

DR. BRODIE. I know nothing of the circumstances. I am only telling you what I think might be best for him.

LILIAN (*dry-eyed*). Is there to be no thought of what would be best for me?

DR. BRODIE (*gently*). Might it not be best for you also?

LILIAN. I have nowhere to go—nowhere.

(*Perhaps he does not quite believe her, but if his manner hardens it is only to gain his point.*)

DR. BRODIE. Better that I should know nothing.

LILIAN. I am not what you think me.

DR. BRODIE. No one is. But prove it, madam, by going.

LILIAN. What is to become of me? (*He shakes his head.*) I loved him—I risked everything for him—I am lost.

DR. BRODIE. Those who risk all and lose have to face the consequences.

LILIAN. I was going with him.

(*He might say, 'You can go with him still, unfortunate one, if you choose,' but of course he does not. Instead he opens the door respectfully. She bows, gives him a pitiful smile of thanks and goes away.*

Let us return to GARSON'S *house and see how his little dinner is faring.*

As MR. GARSON *enters the room in evening dress, his bad temper removed with his clothes, he meets his butler.*)

GARSON. Have I time to write a note, Withers?

WITHERS. It is two minutes short of the half-hour, sir.

GARSON (*going to his desk*). Her ladyship not down yet?

WITHERS. I believe not, sir.

GARSON. She isn't usually late. I didn't hear her in her room.

WITHERS. Shall I send up to inquire, sir?

GARSON. Oh no, she will be down directly, no doubt.

(*He sits at a desk and unlocks a drawer with his keys. It is the fatal drawer. Stretching out his hand for some papers he knows to be there, it encounters something metallic, which he draws out. Without rising he feels for further jewellery, but there is evidently no more. He has recognised his find but has no suspicion, and is sitting there chuckling over it when* WITHERS *announces two guests,* MR. *and* MRS. REDDING, *both exuding opulence.*)

REDDING. You seem to be having a little joke all to yourself, Garson.

GARSON. Ah, welcome both.

MRS. REDDING. But the joke?

(*For reply their host holds up the jewels.*)

REDDING. My eye! No joke for the party that footed the bill.

GARSON. I put my hand into that drawer for some papers, and it found these instead.

REDDING. All I can say is 'Halves.'

MRS. REDDING. Silly man, they are Lady Lilian's. I know them quite well.

GARSON. The joke, Redding, is that I now see why my wife is late for dinner.

MRS. REDDING. It is we who are early; but tell us.

GARSON. She must have shoved them in there —(*with a certain pride*) her set are more careless than ours—and then forgotten where she put them. I bet she is searching high and low for them at this moment.

MRS. REDDING (*who would like to say that her set can be fashionably careless also*). The poor dear! But suppose some servant, the awful man who winds the clocks——

GARSON. Oh, they were safe enough. She had happened to find the drawer unlocked but

she had the sense to shut it, and all these drawers lock when they shut. (*He shuts the drawer and it clicks, perhaps an effort to tell its master something.*) I have the only key. (*He puts the jewels into his pocket and greets another guest.*)

WITHERS. Dr. Brodie.

GARSON. Very pleased to see you, Brodie, in my little place.

DR. BRODIE. Thank you, Garson. (*He presumes that* MRS. REDDING *is his hostess*) Lady Lilian, I am——

GARSON. No, no, that isn't Lady Lilian.

MRS. REDDING (*archly*). Would that it were, Dr. Brodie!

REDDING (*equally ready*). Oh, come!

GARSON. Dr. Brodie—Mrs. Redding. You have met at the club, Redding.

REDDING. To be sure.

GARSON. I forgot you don't know my wife, Brodie. She will be down in a moment. I must apologise for her being late.

MRS. REDDING. Don't fuss, Mr. Garson. Dr. Brodie knows what women are.

DR. BRODIE. Not I, Mrs. Redding. But I was afraid I should be late myself.

REDDING. Something professional?

DR. BRODIE. Accident in the street. Man knocked over by a motor bus—killed.

GARSON. Rough luck. I can't think what is keeping Lady Lilian.

REDDING. Some one you knew, doctor?

DR. BRODIE. No, but he seems to have done good work in India. Paton is the name.

GARSON. Paton? There was a Paton we met once at dinner who—no, Egypt was his place.

DR. BRODIE. It was Egypt she said. Probably your man.

MRS. REDDING. Was he married?

DR. BRODIE. No, not married. (*He sighs.*) Poor devil!

REDDING. Surely better in the circumstances that he wasn't married.

DR. BRODIE. Oh, much better.

MRS. REDDING. You said 'poor devil.'

DR. BRODIE. Did I? I was thinking of something else.

MRS. REDDING. Of the lady?

DR. BRODIE (*not delighting in her*). Did I say there was a lady?

MRS. REDDING (*smartly*). You are saying it now.

REDDING. Got you, my friend!

DR. BRODIE. Hm! (*His desire is to drop the subject.*) Beast of a night, Garson.

GARSON. Wet?

DR. BRODIE. Drizzle. The most dismal sort of London night.

MRS. REDDING. And the poor devil is out in it?

DR. BRODIE. She is out in it, right enough.

(LADY LILIAN *is not, however, out in it. She now sweeps in from upstairs in a delicious evening confection. She must have dressed in record time, for no doubt she lost a moment trying to open that drawer. She must even have raced her brain, which may be conceived by the fanciful as descending the stairs in pursuit of her.*)

GARSON. You are terribly late, Lilian.

(*She knows at once that nothing has been*

discovered as yet, and her wits make up on her.)

LILIAN. Dear Mrs. Redding, I am so ashamed. Forgive me, kind Mr. Redding.

REDDING (*a courtier when approached infantilely*). All I can say, Lady Lilian, is that you were worth waiting for.

(*Then she sees the doctor, and the recognition is mutual.*)

GARSON. Brodie, my wife at last. I forget, Lilian, whether I mentioned that Dr. Brodie had kindly promised to take pot-luck with us.

LILIAN. No, but I am so pleased, Dr. Brodie —any friend of my husband.

DR. BRODIE. Thank you, Lady Lilian.

MRS. REDDING. He has been telling us such a shocking story.

REDDING. It will spoil my dinner.

GARSON. Not quite, I hope, Redding.

REDDING. No, not quite.

(*They have both a gift for this sort of talk, and have sunny times together.*)

MRS. REDDING. A man killed in the street. Tell her, Dr. Brodie.

Garson. Makes a pretty chump of the husband, though.

GARSON. No doubt. And yet there is humour in it. You don't see, Brodie, that it has its humorous side?

DR. BRODIE. Oh yes, I do, Garson. But as I walked here I was picturing her in dire desolation.

LILIAN. Don't you think she may be in dire desolation still?

DR. BRODIE. Thinking it over, Lady Lilian, I have come to the conclusion that your husband is right, and that I was a sentimental fellow, wasting my sympathy on that lady.

GARSON (*who is not unsusceptible to praise*). Exactly.

(*Dinner is announced, and he is indicating to* BRODIE *to take in* LADY LILIAN, *when* MRS. REDDING, *the only one who has remembered the jewellery, touches her throat and wrists significantly. He gives her and her husband a private wink.*)

Hullo, Lil, where are those emeralds? Didn't you get 'em out of me specially for that frock?

(*Only one of the company, a new acquaint-*

ance, notices his hostess go rigid for a moment. So her husband has found the jewels! Something inside her that is clamouring for utterance is about to betray her, when she sees a glance pass from her husband to the drawer. She is uncertain how much has been found out, but she cannot believe that if this man knows everything he could have had the self-control to play cat to her for so long.)

LILIAN (*taking a risk*). I took them off down here and left them for safety in one of your drawers.

GARSON. Which drawer?

LILIAN (*crossing to it*). This one.

GARSON (*making a sign with his fingers behind his back to the* REDDINGS). Best put them on; I like you in 'em.

(*He tosses her his keys, and as she opens the drawer he has another gleeful moment with his accomplices.* BRODIE, *whose attention is confined to her, understands that somehow a crisis has been reached, and oddly enough he does not want her to be caught.*)

Garson. Makes a pretty chump of the husband, though.

GARSON. No doubt. And yet there is humour in it. You don't see, Brodie, that it has its humorous side?

DR. BRODIE. Oh yes, I do, Garson. But as I walked here I was picturing her in dire desolation.

LILIAN. Don't you think she may be in dire desolation still?

DR. BRODIE. Thinking it over, Lady Lilian, I have come to the conclusion that your husband is right, and that I was a sentimental fellow, wasting my sympathy on that lady.

GARSON (*who is not unsusceptible to praise*). Exactly.

(*Dinner is announced, and he is indicating to* BRODIE *to take in* LADY LILIAN, *when* MRS. REDDING, *the only one who has remembered the jewellery, touches her throat and wrists significantly. He gives her and her husband a private wink.*)

Hullo, Lil, where are those emeralds? Didn't you get 'em out of me specially for that frock?

(*Only one of the company, a new acquaint-*

ance, notices his hostess go rigid for a moment. So her husband has found the jewels! Something inside her that is clamouring for utterance is about to betray her, when she sees a glance pass from her husband to the drawer. She is uncertain how much has been found out, but she cannot believe that if this man knows everything he could have had the self-control to play cat to her for so long.)

LILIAN (*taking a risk*). I took them off down here and left them for safety in one of your drawers.

GARSON. Which drawer?

LILIAN (*crossing to it*). This one.

GARSON (*making a sign with his fingers behind his back to the* REDDINGS). Best put them on; I like you in 'em.

(*He tosses her his keys, and as she opens the drawer he has another gleeful moment with his accomplices.* BRODIE, *whose attention is confined to her, understands that somehow a crisis has been reached, and oddly enough he does not want her to be caught.*)

LILIAN (*turning round, aghast*). They are gone!

GARSON (*histrionically*). Gone?

LILIAN. Richard, what is to be done? My emeralds!

GARSON. Gone! The police——

LILIAN. Yes, yes!

MRS. REDDING. Mr. Garson, how can you keep it up? Don't you see she is nearly fainting, and so should I be. Emeralds!

GARSON (*with the conqueror's good nature*). Come, come, Lil, calm yourself. This should be a lesson to you, though. But it 's all right—just a trick I was playing on you. I found them in the drawer.

REDDING (*admiringly*). Never was such a masterpiece at a trick as Garson!

GARSON (*producing the jewels from his pocket like a wizard*). Here they are!

(*He gallantly places them on her person, and even gives her a peck, which brings him very near to something she is holding in her hand beneath her handkerchief.* GARSON *takes in* MRS. REDDING, *and* REDDING *has*

to go without a lady. Before LILIAN *and* BRODIE *follow them she throws a letter into the fire, and as the little spitfire turns to ashes she puts on her finger a wedding-ring that she has taken out of it. She reels for a moment, then looks to* BRODIE *for his commentary. He has none, but as a medical man he feels her pulse.*)

SEVEN WOMEN

SEVEN WOMEN

Mr. and Mrs. Tovey, a pleasant couple of the agreeable age, are in their Chelsea drawing-room, the envied bit of which is the long low twisted window at the back overlooking the river. They never draw the curtains on this view when (as to-night) visitors are expected, for it is one of the fairest in London, especially by night; but they often ask you to step on to the leads, from which every moving coal-barge with a light on it is floating magic. The Toveys, knowing themselves to be alone, are discussing to-night's dinner at their ease, when up steals the rogue of a curtain. 'The audience, madam,' we say, and go, as primly as if we were the parlour-maid. Perhaps they have not heard us, for the talk continues as if they were still unobserved.

TOVEY (*approvingly*). A capital little menu.

MRS. TOVEY (*though she thinks so herself*). Of course it is a short dinner, Jack, to offer to such a celebrity. (*With a sigh*) I must say it would have been rather nice of you if you could

have remembered whether when Captain Rattray was a boy he liked lamb.

TOVEY. My dear, just because Rattray has had this little flutter in China waters I, who haven't seen him for twenty years, am expected to remember whether when we were inky beasts at school he liked lamb. All I do remember is that he was timid and that I punched the heads of the boys who bullied him.

MRS. TOVEY. Yes, I have noticed that is the one thing all men remember about a school friend.

TOVEY. Any further orders, madam?

MRS. TOVEY (*with gentle resignation*). Well, it would be rather sweet of you if you didn't try to be funny to-night. I am so anxious to make this dinner a success.

TOVEY (*ever explanatory on this subject*). My own, I don't try to be funny; I am funny.

MRS. TOVEY. Yes, I know you can't help it, and I don't mind when we are alone. But in company some of your jokes—that one about the murderess, for instance——

TOVEY. Best of women; but even though

you are that, do endeavour to be fair. She was amused by it herself.

MRS. TOVEY. Ah, but suppose some one present had believed it!

TOVEY (*nobly*). Very well. I'll try to be dull, dear. (*She has risen quickly.*) Whither away?

MRS. TOVEY. I thought I heard the bell.

TOVEY. Can't be anybody yet; there 's half an hour to dinner time.

MRS. TOVEY. It is some one. And neither of us dressed!

(*She rushes off.*

The maid ushers in CAPTAIN RATTRAY, *a naval officer, in levee dress.*)

TOVEY. How are you, Rattray?

CAPTAIN R. How do you do, Tovey?

(*For a moment only are they stiff and self-conscious.*)

TOVEY. Bobbin, that was!

CAPTAIN R. Inky Paws, that used to be! (*They take candid stock of each other.*)

TOVEY. A little grey at the roots.

CAPTAIN R. Chest slipped down a bit.

TOVEY. To think of old Bobbin blossoming into a nut!

CAPTAIN R. I warned you I was going on to a levee and would have to come in these.

TOVEY. We wanted you in these; in fact it was these we wanted even more than you. Remember the pillow fights, Bobbin?

CAPTAIN R. (*warmly*). Rather! Do you remember you were a bit puny and how I used to fight the brutes who ill-used you?

TOVEY (*coldly*). I don't remember that.

CAPTAIN R. And now I hear little Inky Paws has had the pluck to take unto him a squaw.

TOVEY. More than you have had.

CAPTAIN R. (*reproducing the face with which he went to his first dance*). They scare me as much as ever, Jack.

TOVEY. That reminds me: do you like lamb?

CAPTAIN R. I could eat lamb by the solid hour.

TOVEY. Then you'll like my wife. By the way, that explains why you come to a dinner-party half an hour before the time.

CAPTAIN R. (*giving himself up for lost*). I was asked for eight.

TOVEY. Sure?

CAPTAIN R. (*on oath*). I have your wife's letter with me.

TOVEY. Then you are forgiven. Her mistake. She is dressing wildly now, and if you will excuse me——

CAPTAIN R. Don't mind me.

(TOVEY *is going.*)

Stop, Jack. Who are the other guests?

TOVEY (*pondering*). Let me see.

CAPTAIN R. (*shaking him*). Never mind the men, tell me about the women; they are the fearsome ones.

TOVEY. Well, we have all kinds for you, not knowing your taste. For instance, there is one dear lady who has no sense of humour.

CAPTAIN R. (*with certain memories*). I am sure there is.

TOVEY. If you want to know which one she is, try them with a funny story. Then there is one who has almost too much sense of humour. If there is anything ridiculous about you, Bobbin, as I dare say there is, she will spot it at once.

CAPTAIN R. Oh, help; don't put me beside that one.

TOVEY. You would prefer the politician?

CAPTAIN R. The what?

TOVEY. No platform is complete without them nowadays. If she drops her handkerchief and you pick it up for her there will be a riot. By the way, she drops her things all over the place. You will know her by that.

CAPTAIN R. Ancient friend, do dress quickly.

TOVEY. You will be all right. Stick to the Very woman. She is one of the good old-fashioned, obedient clinging kind that our fathers knew.

CAPTAIN R. (*disbelieving*). Did you say obedient, Jack?

TOVEY. Sounds like a dream, doesn't it? Speaking of fathers, there is a mother coming. You know, the sort of woman who is a mother and nothing else.

CAPTAIN R. I like those simple souls.

TOVEY. The coquette isn't what you would call a simple soul.

CAPTAIN R. A coquette, too?

TOVEY. The most audacious flirt of my acquaintance.

(CAPTAIN RATTRAY *is a little complacent.*) Why that swagger?

CAPTAIN R. I wasn't swaggering, but I get on rather well with that kind. Once at an India station—— However.

TOVEY. I think that completes the list. (*Disregarding a recent promise*) Stop, though, there is one more—a murderess.

CAPTAIN R. None of your blarney, Jack.

TOVEY. Don't think I am joking. (*Confidentially*) Fact is, since you were last on leave the order of the day for dinners has become a celebrity at any cost.

CAPTAIN R. Draw the line.

TOVEY. We don't nowadays; life is too strenuous. You will see what deference we pay her. Why, man alive, if it had not been for you the likes of us couldn't have got her. She had a much more exalted engagement, and broke it to meet you.

CAPTAIN R. Tosh!

TOVEY. But listen; the bell again! Here's another who has been asked too early.

CAPTAIN R. Let us hope it is a man.

TOVEY. I hear the swish of skirts. Bobbin, with perfect confidence, I leave you to do the honours.

CAPTAIN R. As you love me, no!

TOVEY. I must scoot.

CAPTAIN R. (*intercepting him*). You are placing me in a horrible position! No humour—too much humour—public speaker who spills her things, but I mustn't lift them up for her. A Very woman of the clinging kind—a mother and nothing else—a coquette—and a murderess who broke an engagement to meet me. How am I to know which this one is?

TOVEY (*as he glides past him*). Be a sportsman, my gallant tar, and find out.

(CAPTAIN RATTRAY *is meditating an escape on to the leads when the maid shows in* LEONORA. LEONORA *is an unspeakable darling; and this is all the guidance that can be given to the lady playing her. She grasps the situation and bows charmingly.*

CAPTAIN RATTRAY'S *awkwardness makes a good impression on her.*)

LEONORA. I suppose Mrs. Tovey hasn't yet——

CAPTAIN R. Perhaps I ought to explain——

(*They have spoken simultaneously.*)

CAPTAIN R. I beg your pardon.

LEONORA. You were saying?

CAPTAIN R. No, you.

LEONORA. Please—if I did not know this room——

CAPTAIN R. The fact is that Mr. Tovey——

(*They are at it again; this nonsense puts them on easier terms.*)

CAPTAIN R. I fancy you must be in the same predicament as myself. I have arrived to dinner half an hour too soon.

LEONORA. I was asked for eight o'clock.

CAPTAIN R. And I. But it was a mistake. Dinner is at eight-thirty.

LEONORA. Oh dear!

CAPTAIN R. Mr. Tovey has just told me. He isn't sure whether the same mistake has been made with the others or not.

LEONORA. I see. How horrid of us (*sitting that he may do so also, one of the most excellent things in woman*).

CAPTAIN R. But it isn't our fault.

LEONORA. That is true. Still, how horrid of us.

(*It strikes him that she must be that inconsequential delight to memory dear, the Very woman.*)

CAPTAIN R. (*enlightened*). Ha!

LEONORA (*arrested*). What?

CAPTAIN R. You know, that is just what my mother would have said in the same circumstances. Perhaps I should say that my name is Rattray.

LEONORA. I was sure of it. If I may say so, we are all proud of Captain Rattray.

CAPTAIN R. (*rushing her off the gangway*). Oh, please don't. I did nothing. (*Smiling*) I flatter myself I know something about you also.

LEONORA (*curious*). You do? About me? What?

CAPTAIN R. (*with the modest self-satisfaction*

that comes to the discriminating). I have found it out since you came into the room.

LEONORA. But how uncanny. I'm listening.

CAPTAIN R. I have found out that you are a Very woman.

LEONORA. What is that?

CAPTAIN R. (*comprehensively*). Ah!

LEONORA. Do tell me.

CAPTAIN R. (*reflecting*). I suppose it is a man's phrase.

LEONORA. That is why I want to know what it means?

CAPTAIN R. (*in deep waters*). A Very woman is—is—well, she is a clinging woman. All sailors like clinging women.

LEONORA. Do they? What do they like them to cling to?

CAPTAIN R. As to that—(*his snotties would enjoy seeing him now*)—I am afraid I seem very stupid. You see, for more than a year I have scarcely spoken to a woman.

LEONORA (*sympathetic*). Constant practice is everything in speaking. I could always speak

fairly fluently in committees and so on. But in the Albert Hall——

CAPTAIN R. (*in consternation*). You don't mean—politics?

LEONORA. Oh yes, why not? Is anything wrong?

CAPTAIN R. (*depressed*). Nothing.

(*Her handkerchief falls. He is about to pick it up when he remembers that politicians don't like this.*)

May I?

LEONORA. Not if it is too much trouble. (*She picks it up herself.*)

CAPTAIN R. I am awfully sorry. The fact is, you gave me a little shock just now.

LEONORA. I did? How? Perhaps I am not the woman you thought me after all?

CAPTAIN R. No, you are not.

(*He is so lugubrious that she laughs.*)

LEONORA. You had better give me up, Captain Rattray.

CAPTAIN R. Not I.

(*She raises her eyebrows at his audacity.*)

LEONORA (*changing the subject*). Mrs. Tovey has a dear house, don't you think?

CAPTAIN R. (*looking about him for the first time*). Yes, very. Some pretty things here.

LEONORA. Aren't there? But the real treasures, of course, are the two lovelies on the top floor of the house.

CAPTAIN R. (*mildly surprised*). Oh?

LEONORA (*explanatory*). In the room where the night-lights are.

CAPTAIN R. (*who has forgotten domesticity*). Night-lights?

LEONORA. Haven't you been up?

CAPTAIN R. On the top floor? No.

LEONORA. I thought you were an old school friend of Mr. Tovey?

CAPTAIN R. I am.

LEONORA. And he didn't rush you to the top of the house? To the two rooms where the large fire-guards are?

CAPTAIN R. No; what are the fire-guards for?

LEONORA. To prevent them falling into the fire, of course.

CAPTAIN R. Whom? Jack and his wife?

LEONORA. Oh, I shall never understand men!

CAPTAIN R. I can't quite—what is it that Jack Tovey keeps at the top floor of the house?

LEONORA (*reproachfully*). Oh, Captain Rattray, his pretty things.

CAPTAIN R. (*dense*). Yes, I see—I didn't even know that he was a collector. But what a rum place to keep them.

(*He sees she is shocked.*)

Excuse me, I have been such a long time at sea.

LEONORA (*shocked*). Captain Rattray, were you never kept on the top floor?

CAPTAIN R. Only when I was a chicken. (*Daylight reaches him.*) You don't mean to say that Inky Paws—Jack Tovey—that he——?

LEONORA (*nodding delightedly*). Yes, two! A boy and a girl.

CAPTAIN R. A boy and a girl? (*He is in touch with her at last.*) That is the best joke I have heard since I came back.

LEONORA. Joke?

CAPTAIN R. Well, isn't it?

LEONORA (*wounded*). Mrs. Tovey's babies

are a joke, are they? I can tell you another joke, Captain Rattray. (*Haughtily*) I also am a—collector.

CAPTAIN B. You?

LEONORA. It is funny, isn't it!

CAPTAIN R. (*contritely*). Do forgive me. Somehow I—didn't think of you as a mother.

LEONORA (*to whom this is still more dreadful*). You didn't think—Captain Rattray, I could forgive you a good deal, but I will never forgive you that. (*She is about to step out on to the leads.*)

CAPTAIN R. (*desperate*). I could eat my hat.

LEONORA (*freezingly*). Not before me, please.

CAPTAIN R. I say, I wasn't speaking against mothers. I think there is nothing like them.

LEONORA (*perhaps a little unfairly*). You said I didn't deserve to be one.

CAPTAIN R. (*stung*). I did not.

LEONORA. You needn't bark. (*She melts easily.*) Surely you might have guessed.

CAPTAIN R. It was dense of me. I can see it now clearly enough.

LEONORA. Oh?

CAPTAIN R. It is written all over you.

LEONORA (*rather tart*). I don't think it is so obvious as that.

CAPTAIN R. No, indeed—that is, whatever you prefer. I say, do let me down softly.

LEONORA (*smiling divinely*). That was almost like Harry!

CAPTAIN R. (*grumpily*). Was it?

LEONORA (*softly*). He is my son.

CAPTAIN R. (*relieved*). A gorgeous fellow, I'll be bound. (*Cunningly*) Tell me about him.

LEONORA (*tremulously*). You wouldn't really care to know.

CAPTAIN R. I would indeed. It may seem strange to you——

LEONORA. Oh, no.

CAPTAIN R. How old is he?

LEONORA. Fourteen and two months.

CAPTAIN R. What a ripper.

LEONORA. He is at school.

CAPTAIN R. Well done.

LEONORA. He is in the O.T.C.

CAPTAIN R. Of course he is.

LEONORA. I had a letter from him to-day—he says—— (*It is evidently in the bodice of her gown.*)

CAPTAIN R. Nothing wrong, I hope?

LEONORA (*in a flood of emotion*). He—he—he wants me to send him a razor.

CAPTAIN R. (*wildly sympathetic*). The ass—the ungrateful booby—the——

LEONORA (*flaming up*). How can you! You—— Oh, you *man.*

CAPTAIN R. (*hurriedly*). It is myself, I mean, not him. Besides, you were almost crying, as if he had hurt you.

LEONORA. Harry hurt me! Don't you see how splendid it is?

CAPTAIN R. Rather! I say, do let me send Harry his first razor.

LEONORA (*pleased*). Oh, no.

CAPTAIN R. After all, I must know more about razors than you do. Other subjects—but razors?

LEONORA (*in* HARRY'S *interest*). That must be true, of course.

CAPTAIN R. Leave it to me.

LEONORA. Something suitable. He is five feet five and rather fair.

CAPTAIN R. I'll get that kind.

LEONORA. And—and please—rather a blunt one.

CAPTAIN R. (*admiring her*). I believe you would try it on yourself if that would be any help to Harry.

LEONORA. Of course I would.

CAPTAIN R. May I ask, how many children have you?

LEONORA (*nervously, to do her justice*). Would you think six a large number?

CAPTAIN R. Six?

(*He is a little shaken and loses favour in her eyes.*)

LEONORA (*with one look putting the dastard in his place*). Oh, you would?

CAPTAIN R. (*recklessly*). Not at all. (*Suddenly seeing which of the women this is*) Ha!

LEONORA. What is it now?

CAPTAIN R. (*the solution found*). A mother and nothing else!

LEONORA. I beg your pardon.

CAPTAIN R. It is a—a quotation. Mr. Tovey told me there is a lady dining here to-night who is a mother and nothing else.

LEONORA. What an odd way of putting it. I wonder who she can be?

CAPTAIN R. I wonder!

LEONORA. I never met a woman of whom that could be said.

CAPTAIN R. I have.

LEONORA. Nice?

CAPTAIN R. Distinctly.

(*She accidentally drops her bag and he picks it up at once.*)

LEONORA. Quicker than last time.

CAPTAIN R. (*who could kick himself for being so long in getting at it*). I didn't know you then. (*He keeps the bag in his hand.*)

LEONORA. Yes, it is a nice bag.

CAPTAIN R. (*thoughtfully*). Ha!

LEONORA. I won it last Christmas.

CAPTAIN R. Won it?

LEONORA. Yes, it was one of the prizes at a fancy-dress dance.

(*He is aghast. Is she the mother and nothing else after all?*)

CAPTAIN R. Were *you* in fancy dress?

LEONORA. Yes. I went as a Bacchante.

CAPTAIN R. You did!

LEONORA. I thought it would suit me. Don't you think so?

CAPTAIN R. I dare say. (*He gives her back the bag and draws his hand across his brow.*)

LEONORA (*feeling that he disapproves*). Don't you like dancing?

CAPTAIN R. Oh yes—but—yes, immensely.

LEONORA. I adore it. But your woman wouldn't dance?

CAPTAIN R. My woman?

LEONORA. The one who is a mother and nothing else.

CAPTAIN R. I had forgotten her. No, not as a Bacchante, she—and for a moment I thought that you—— (*As he looks at her a not entirely welcome idea strikes him.*) Would you mind my telling you a funny story?

LEONORA (*surprised*). I should love it.

CAPTAIN R. (*placing a chair for her in the*

manner of the conjurer). I ought to explain first that I am telling it to you with a purpose.

LEONORA. How odd, a funny story with a purpose!

CAPTAIN R. (*with foreboding*). The fact is, the way you take it will tell me something about you.

LEONORA (*astounded*). It will?

CAPTAIN R. If you would rather I didn't——

LEONORA. Do go on.

CAPTAIN R. Well, it was at a dinner-party the other night. Perhaps you know the story.

LEONORA. I don't recognise it so far.

CAPTAIN R. A lady dining there had talked mostly to the man who took her in; she had scarcely looked at the man on her other side, who was quite young but extremely bald. Toward the end of dinner, however, he stooped to pick up his napkin——

LEONORA. The bald man?

CAPTAIN R. Yes.

LEONORA (*excitedly*). I feel sure we are coming to the thing that is to tell you so much about me.

CAPTAIN R. (*a little excited himself*). Well, we are.

LEONORA. How you are watching me!

CAPTAIN R. I can't help it. She turned as he stooped, and seeing nothing but his bald head—it was rather yellow, too—she thought it was fruit being handed round by a servant, and she said: 'No, no melon, thank you.'

(*He looks anxiously at her.*)

LEONORA. And didn't she?

CAPTAIN R. Didn't she what?

LEONORA. Didn't she have any melon?

CAPTAIN R. (*heavily*). I don't know. I believe not.

LEONORA. Well?

CAPTAIN R. That's all.

LEONORA. Oh! (*Politely*) What a good story. (*Suddenly suspicious*) But it can't tell you anything about me?

CAPTAIN R. Indeed it does.

LEONORA. Tell me.

CAPTAIN R. Never. But I'll tell you something else now. Before Mr. Tovey hurried away to dress he told me something about each

of the ladies who is coming to dinner, but not their names, and all this time I have been trying to find out which of them you are.

LEONORA. The creature! And which one am I?

CAPTAIN R. I have just found out. I went wrong several times.

LEONORA. Do tell me.

CAPTAIN R. Not I.

LEONORA. At least tell me who the others are. I may know them.

CAPTAIN R. I won't tell you the ones I mistook for you, but I'll tell you the ones I knew from the first you couldn't be.

LEONORA. Yes, do.

CAPTAIN R. One is a lady with too much sense of humour.

LEONORA. Let me think.

CAPTAIN R. I'm glad you're not that one.

LEONORA. I wonder if I am?

CAPTAIN R. (*with conviction*). No, I know you are not.

LEONORA. It is that horrid melon that has put you against me.

CAPTAIN R. I am not at all against you. Then there is another lady who is a coquette.

LEONORA (*with considerable interest*). Tell me every word the man said about her.

CAPTAIN R. He said: 'She is the most audacious flirt of my acquaintance.' Can you place her?

LEONORA. No. Are there any more?

CAPTAIN R. That was all. Ah, well, he mentioned one other, but that was only his fun.

LEONORA. Still, tell me.

CAPTAIN R. He said there was a murderess coming.

(*She remembers a certain story of Master Jack's.*)

LEONORA. Oh?

CAPTAIN R. Absurd!

LEONORA. I don't see why it should be so absurd.

CAPTAIN R. You don't tell me you would come here if you knew a murderess had been invited?

LEONORA. I did know she had been invited.

CAPTAIN R. Ah, of course there is some explanation.

LEONORA (*brightly*). Yes, it is really all right. I thought at first that you were to be fussy about it.

CAPTAIN R. Fussy! Would you mind telling me about this woman?

LEONORA. She was in a railway carriage with her little girl. A man came into the carriage, and he put down the window. She was quite polite. She said, 'Would you mind keeping the window up, because my little girl has a cold?' He said, 'I'm sorry, but I feel stifled unless I have a window open.' (*She looks to see if Captain Rattray is taking in the enormity of this man's behaviour.*)

CAPTAIN R. (*attentively*). Yes?

LEONORA. She was splendidly patient. She said, 'But my little girl has a cold. Please to shut the window.' He refused. Then there was nothing else for her to do, was there?

CAPTAIN R. (*rather breathless*). What did she do?

LEONORA. She opened the door and pushed him out.

CAPTAIN R. You don't mean he was killed?

LEONORA. Yes, he fell on the line and killed himself.

CAPTAIN R. Before her eyes?

LEONORA. The train was going rather fast, but she had just time to see him go bump.

CAPTAIN R. What a dreadful—— And then?

LEONORA (*finishing her story*). Then she put up the window. Nothing so very dreadful, you see.

CAPTAIN R. (*dazed*). Is this England?

LEONORA (*huffily*). Oh, if you are to take it in that way.

CAPTAIN R. This man——

LEONORA. Of course you take the man's side.

CAPTAIN R. (*exasperated*). You talk as if you didn't blame her.

LEONORA (*patiently*). Haven't I told you that her little girl had a cold.

CAPTAIN R. Damn her little girl!

LEONORA (*imperious*). Leave me. Go and dine somewhere else. Eat your hat.

CAPTAIN R. But I—but——

LEONORA (*again making for the leads*). And

I came here specially to meet you. I broke another engagement to meet you.

CAPTAIN R. (*doddering*). What? I was told she did that. Don't tell me you are this woman!

LEONORA. Yes, I am the woman—and I wish you had been the man! (*She sinks down by the window, but whether she is sobbing or laughing it would need a woman to say, such as* MRS. TOVEY, *who now returns in evening dress.*)

MRS. TOVEY (*finding herself plunged in drama*). Dearest, whatever is the matter?

(LEONORA *still hides her countenance.*) Captain Rattray? I am so delighted. But I don't understand.

LEONORA (*through her fingers*). He has been calling me the most awful names.

MRS. TOVEY. Do you know each other?

CAPTAIN R. (*sternly*). I wish we didn't, Mrs. Tovey.

LEONORA (*shrinking*). He wants to masthead me!

MRS. TOVEY. Really, Captain Rattray. (*But she suspects those heaving shoulders of* LEONORA.)

(MR. TOVEY *comes.*)

TOVEY. So sorry to be late, Leonora. Well, what do you think of the great man, Laura? Doesn't come up to expectation, does he? But they never do. Hullo, anything wrong?

LEONORA (*appealing*). Jack, he says I pushed a man out of a railway carriage.

CAPTAIN R. *I* said it!

LEONORA. There he goes again!

TOVEY. But how did you get to know about that, Rattray?

CAPTAIN R. You told me of the woman, and she has admitted that it was she.

TOVEY. I'm lost!

MRS. TOVEY. Jack, you are incorrigible!

LEONORA. Tell him, Jack.

TOVEY. Bobbin, it's all right. Leonora never actually did it. It's just the sort of thing that we often say of her she would do. So silly about her brats, you know.

(*The Captain is unspeakably relieved.*)

LEONORA (*reproachful*). How could you think such a thing of me?

CAPTAIN R. (*with equal justice*). Why did you deceive me?

LEONORA (*sweetly*). To pay you back for the melon.

CAPTAIN R. (*as it becomes clearer*). I'm glad. But, I say, I am so sorry I made you cry.

MRS. TOVEY (*merciless to the real delinquent*). You didn't make her cry, Captain Rattray.

LEONORA. At any rate my eyes are red—oh dear, and so many people coming.

MRS. TOVEY. Many people? Whatever makes you think that?

LEONORA. Captain Rattray said so.

CAPTAIN R. You told me of seven ladies, Jack.

(MRS. TOVEY *bestows on her husband the sad look of wives.*)

MRS. TOVEY. Jack, why doesn't the law let me give you up!

TOVEY. The fact is, Bobbin—you see, Leonora—I—ah—the fact is——

(*The dinner announcement comes opportunely.*)

LEONORA (*only half enlightened*). But—but—the others? Aren't we to wait for them?

CAPTAIN R. (*still entirely benighted*). Yes, the other guests—all those ladies?

TOVEY. You thick-headed sailor-man, give my wife your arm and come in to dinner. There are no other ladies. This lady—is all those ladies.

LEONORA (*as she goes in to dinner with him*). You wretch, Jack!

CAPTAIN R. (*who needs a moment longer to grasp it*). All the seven? But how can—I see it, I see it. Mrs. Tovey, she *is* all the seven!

MRS. TOVEY. She is indeed—and some more. (*She takes his arm.*)

CAPTAIN R. Just one other word; is she a widow?

MRS. TOVEY. Yes.

CAPTAIN R. Good!

OLD FRIENDS

OLD FRIENDS

It is a winter evening, and Mr. and Mrs. Brand and their daughter with one guest are sitting round the fire in their small country house near London. He is a prosperous man of about sixty who goes by car to his work in the city daily, and is generally liked. Mrs. Brand, somewhat younger, is knitting and is as quiet as her husband is cheery; she has perhaps used up her emotions long ago. They are both devoted to their daughter, Carry, an engaging girl of twenty, who is very animated at present; she has only been 'engaged' since five o'clock. The visitor is a gentle, elderly clergyman, Mr. Carroll, much loved by his parishioners because he never looks trouble in the face. They have been dining together in honour of the engagement, and Mr. Carroll is sipping a mild glass of whisky and water.

STEPHEN (*in his best jocular manner*). Well, well, all I can say, Carroll, is, Be thankful that you never had a daughter. Just when one is getting used to them, they give notice.

CARROLL (*in the same spirit*). Ah me!

CARRY (*all impetuosity*). Mother, they are laughing at me.

MRS. BRAND (*all placidity*). I wouldn't torment her, Stephen. An engagement ring is quite enough excitement for one evening; and she isn't strong.

STEPHEN (*immediately solicitous*). There, there, Carry; but you are strong now, aren't you?

CARRY (*displaying her muscles, or the want of them*). I am frightfully strong now.

CARROLL. You haven't been bothered by those headaches lately, Carry?

CARRY. Not for ever so long.

STEPHEN. Ah, we mustn't boast. Less than a month ago, wasn't it, Agnes, that one kept her in bed all day?

MRS. BRAND. Yes, less than a month.

(CARRY *puts her hand in her mother's, who presses it softly to her breast.*)

CARRY (*cajoling*). You are fond of Dick, aren't you, father?

STEPHEN. He is great. (*She fondles his*

face.) Not that he is worthy of my Carry—no man could be quite that—eh, Agnes?

(MRS. BRAND *does not answer.*)

Agnes?

MRS. BRAND. No, of course we think that. (*She rises.*) It is past our bed-time, Carry.

CARROLL. And I must be stepping across to the rectory.

STEPHEN. Stay a bit, Carroll.

MRS. BRAND. Do, if you will excuse our leaving you. Stephen sits late, you know.

STEPHEN. I am a bad sleeper, and I use this room now (*indicating a door on the right*), so as not to disturb the house. I'll be glad of your company, Carroll. It's a gloomy house when one is alone.

CARRY. It is the darlingest house.

STEPHEN. But it is gloomy. It isn't well lit.

CARRY (*mischievously*). Just think, Mr. Carroll, father is afraid of the dark.

CARROLL. Eh, what?

STEPHEN. That is her fun.

MRS. BRAND (*not liking the subject*). Come, Carry, say good-night.

CARRY (*to* CARROLL). But he is! He sleeps with the lamp burning.

STEPHEN. How do you know that?

CARRY. I have seen it.

STEPHEN. You have been downstairs in the night time?

(CARRY *looks to her mother.*)

MRS. BRAND (*as quietly as ever*). Yes, it was once I couldn't sleep, and I sent her down for a book. (*To* CARROLL) Carry sleeps in my room.

STEPHEN (*hardly aware yet that she is grown up*). It gives me the creeps to think of Carry wandering about the house in the night.

MRS. BRAND. It was only the once.

STEPHEN. I should think so.

CARRY (*to* CARROLL). Good-night, my dears.

(*She has a loving moment with her father, kissing him impulsively on different parts of his head, which she carefully selects.*)

STEPHEN. Excuse me, Carroll; she is my only child. (*Affectionately to his wife*) Good-night, Agnes. (*He kisses her, but she does not respond.*) We shall still have each other, Agnes.

MRS. BRAND. Yes.

(*She and* CARRY *go out by the door at the back,* CARRY *flitting like a butterfly.*)

CARROLL (*looking after them*). A very happy picture—very—very. By the way, what did Carry mean by saying you were afraid of the dark?

STEPHEN (*looking at him as if about to answer, then turning away from the subject*). Make yourself comfortable, Carroll; fill up again.

CARROLL (*resuming his seat*). No, thank you —I've not finished yet, and besides I never exceed the one glass. (*Reminiscent*) Ah, Brand, do you remember when you came to live here how I wouldn't take even the one glass in this house?

STEPHEN (*genially*). You thought that in keeping it here for my friends I was doing an unwise thing; putting temptation in my own way.

CARROLL. I didn't know how strong you were.

STEPHEN (*thankfully*). I haven't touched it once in these three years, Carroll. I haven't the smallest desire to do so.

CARROLL (*sipping*). A splendid victory.

STEPHEN (*holding up the decanter*). Luddy me, to look at the thing, and think it had me for the best part of my life! Ugh! Well, if you're sure you won't have any more I'll lock it away. I always do that in case the servants —I wouldn't like to think I left it in their way.

CARROLL (*finishing his glass*). Quite right. I do the same thing myself.

(STEPHEN *locks up the decanter in a cupboard and returns the key to his pocket.*)

STEPHEN (*grimly*). I can remember a time when, wherever this key had been hidden, I would have found it!

CARROLL (*to avoid unpleasant subjects*). I wouldn't rake up the past, Brand; it's all dead and done with long ago.

STEPHEN (*also settling down by the fire*). Yes, yes. Dead and done with. It was a big thing I did, Carroll.

CARROLL. A great self-conquest.

STEPHEN. Not many men have done it.

CARROLL. Very few.

STEPHEN. Wonderful, isn't it, that the thing has left no mark on me?

CARROLL. Very wonderful.

STEPHEN. It hasn't, you know.

CARROLL. Not that I can see.

STEPHEN (*quite prepared to take offence if it is given*). I've got off almost too cheaply—eh?

CARROLL. True repentance——

STEPHEN. That's it. True repentance. (*Half triumphantly*) Very few of my friends ever knew what a slave I was to it. You see what my home life is. I haven't even suffered in business. Why, even when I was a clerk——

CARROLL. Was it going on even then? Of course I didn't know you at that time.

STEPHEN (*lowering his voice*). Carroll, it was then that it began. I had no predilection for it. No, none. I ordered my glass because the others did—a piece of swagger—but at first it was nauseous to me, and I remember wondering whether they really liked it.

CARROLL. Evil companions.

STEPHEN. They weren't so bad, and they never exceeded as I did, but as it got grip of me

I dropped them, I became secretive. I could keep from it almost easily for stretches of time, and then—then—it was as if something came over me that there was no resisting. That is the best description I can give of it—something came over me. Yet I was forging ahead at the office. It is a strange thing to say, but those bouts seemed to do me no harm—they were like a fillip to me.

CARROLL (*uncomfortable*). I don't like you to say that, Brand.

STEPHEN. I know it's not according to the preachers, but it is how I felt.

CARROLL (*sonorously*). Your conscience, 'the still small voice of conscience.'

STEPHEN (*somehow confidential to-night*). Do you know, I don't think conscience worried me as much as it disturbs people in the books. Not nearly so much as fear. I have held my breath at the narrowness of some of my escapes. But I got off so often that I grew to have a mighty faith in my luck. I backed it.

CARROLL. Not luck, no, no. (*Happily*) You were being reserved for a great end.

STEPHEN. I see that now. But at the time—— Then when I was in the thirties—I met Agnes.

CARROLL (*beaming*). Ah, that is what I want to hear of, and how your love for her made you a new man.

STEPHEN (*emphatic*). My love was there all right, but, Carroll, I was still the same man.

CARROLL. Not you, Brand. No, no! And if ever afterwards you yielded—at least you told her?

STEPHEN. By no means. I gave it up for a time—I tried. But we hadn't been long married before I was as bad as ever. For two years or more I contrived to keep it from her. The cunning of me! My real reason for taking a house in the country was that I could stay a night in town now and again—a night with *it*, Carroll.

CARROLL. Please, please!

STEPHEN (*considering*). Yet in all other matters I was a truthful man, scrupulously honest in business, and there was a high moral

tone about me. That seems strange, but it's true.

CARROLL (*fidgeting*). Don't dwell on that. Tell me of the awakening.

STEPHEN. At last she found out. It was one night—— (*He shudders.*) We won't go into that.

CARROLL (*hastily*). Much better not.

STEPHEN. I told her everything then. And I said I couldn't alter myself.

CARROLL. Come, come! But she——?

STEPHEN. She was fine. She insisted that we should fight it together.

CARROLL (*relieved*). And so it was love that did it after all!

STEPHEN (*rather puzzled*). No, Carroll, it wasn't. I made big efforts, but they failed. It's odd to think that I succeeded long after she had abandoned all attempts to help me. For in the end I did it alone.

CARROLL. Masterful! What was it that gave you strength? Ah, I know.

STEPHEN. No, you don't. What I feel is that I must just have tried harder than

before, and finding myself winning I got fresh courage.

CARROLL. I like to hear that.

STEPHEN. At first I didn't dare to tell Agnes. I couldn't be sure of myself. And when at last I did tell her she doubted me. But time convinced her. I haven't touched it these three years. I haven't wanted to.

CARROLL. She must be proud of you, Brand, as I am.

STEPHEN. Yes, she is.

CARROLL. As you must be of yourself.

STEPHEN. I don't pretend not to know that I have done a big thing. (*Mystified nevertheless*) Yet, you know, it wasn't so difficult as you might think. In the end it was almost easy.

CARROLL. What an encouragement to others!

STEPHEN. Yes, that 's so.

CARROLL. Of course Carry knows nothing about this?

STEPHEN. Not a breath.

CARROLL. Tell me now, what did she mean by saying you were afraid of the dark?

STEPHEN. Oh, that! It was only her fun.

CARROLL. Of course, of course.

(*But there is something on* BRAND'S *mind.*)

STEPHEN. Carroll, do you ever sit up late at the rectory alone?

CARROLL. Often.

STEPHEN (*not so casual as he affects to be*). Odd the way the shadows go creeping about the walls and floors of old houses, isn't it?

CARROLL. You mean shadows from the fire?

STEPHEN. Of course. (*Sharply*) What else could I mean? (*Losing hold of himself*) There is something devilish about them, Carroll!

CARROLL. In what way?

STEPHEN. They know me. They have some connection with me. I don't know what it is.

CARROLL (*soothingly*). You have been working too hard. What connection could they have with you?

STEPHEN. I don't know—(*husky*) I don't want to know. But they know. Perhaps I'll know some night, Carroll!

CARROLL. What do you mean by that? What is the matter with you, Brand? (*He wishes he had gone home.*) Have you spoken of this to any one?

STEPHEN. Only to Agnes.

CARROLL. I mean, to a doctor.

STEPHEN (*irritably*). No, I'm quite well.

CARROLL. You are not. A long holiday——

STEPHEN. All baby talk. I'm past that now. In the daytime it doesn't worry me at all. I'm doing my work as well as ever.

CARROLL. That is good, very good. You'll soon be all right. Turn your back on the thing, Brand, and it will cease to exist.

STEPHEN (*turning his back on* CARROLL). You are no help to me, my friend.

CARROLL (*weakly*). What do you want me to say?

STEPHEN. It is no use your saying only what I want you to say; it has gone beyond that. That is why you are no help to me.

CARROLL. Brand, I—— (*He finds no inspiration.*)

STEPHEN (*roughly*). See here, man, can it

have anything to do—with the past? (*Scared*) They are so familiar with me—as if they were old friends come back.

CARROLL (*clinging to this*). Nerves, merely nerves.

STEPHEN (*eager*). Yes, yes—that is what I wanted you to say, that is just—— Ah, Carroll, you merely say it because it is what I wanted you to say.

CARROLL. Not at all, I—I—— (*He stretches out a weak kindly hand.*)

STEPHEN. I won't keep you any longer. I'll come with you and lock up.

CARROLL (*at the door, anxious to get into the more salubrious night*). Of course if I could—but it *is* getting late; I'll see you to-morrow. It's nothing, I assure you; it will pass away, pass away. You look tired and dead sleepy, Brand.

STEPHEN. Yes, I am.

CARROLL. A good night's rest is my prescription. You will laugh at this in the morning, laugh at it.

STEPHEN. Morning is all right.

CARROLL (*cheerily*). The man who won that great fight isn't going to be worried by shadows!

STEPHEN (*eager*). After what I have done, it wouldn't be fair on me, would it?

CARROLL. Ignore them. Let the dead bury their dead.

STEPHEN. Yes—but do they? Carroll, in those old days when I so often escaped the consequences, I had sometimes a dread that I was only being saved for some worse punishment: I have never paid, you know; don't you preach that everything has to be paid for?

CARROLL (*clutching his hat*). Take the word of a clergyman that you have nothing to fear.

STEPHEN (*less perturbed*). Thank you, Carroll. I think I feel a bit better.

CARROLL. How balmy is the night! A good omen.

(*After seeing him out* BRAND *returns and stands staring at the fire. He opens a book, and puts it away. He lights a lamp and carries it into the bedroom, shutting the door. The room is now only dimly lit by*

the fire. He reappears without the lamp, looking like one who has just been beginning to undress and has changed his mind. He leaves the door ajar, and we see a little light coming from the bedroom, which shows that he has left the lamp burning there. He hesitates, then sits in his chair by the fire. He is tired out. Soon he is asleep. A coal in the fire falls, and a flame shoots up. Moving shadows are cast against the walls. They flicker and fall. The door at the back opens covertly, and CARRY *is seen in her night-gown, carrying a lighted taper. The back of the chair would prevent her seeing* STEPHEN, *but it never strikes her to look for him there. She makes sure that she is not being followed, otherwise her attention is fixed on the bedroom door. She lingers at this door. Then she pushes it open inch by inch and enters noiselessly. In a second she is out again, startled, bewildered, sees* STEPHEN *asleep in the chair and blows out the taper, intent on stealing away. In her hurry she has left*

the bedroom door half open, and this lights the sitting-room to an extent. She hesitates, and beats her hands together, then like one who must go on with what she has to do she comes softly to STEPHEN, *cautiously takes his keys from his pocket—she knows which pocket to find them in—then steals hurriedly to the cupboard in which he had locked the decanter, and she is on her knees opening the door when* STEPHEN *wakes up. He sits staring at her, and as it comes to him what the situation means he rises and cries out.* CARRY *starts to her feet, frightened, and then is immediately cunning in self-defence.*)

CARRY (*brightly*). Oh, father, how you startled me. I thought you were in bed.

STEPHEN. What are you doing, Carry?

CARRY. Mother couldn't sleep. I came down to look for the smelling-salts for her. She left them on the table.

STEPHEN. I'll take them to her.

CARRY (*afraid*). No. (*Cunning again*) I promised not to disturb you.

STEPHEN. Carry!

CARRY (*terrified lest any noise brings down her mother*). Don't! You'll wake her. (*She has exposed herself.*)

STEPHEN. My child!

CARRY (*beating her hands*). Oh!

STEPHEN. What were you doing there?

CARRY (*shrinking*). Father, don't look at me so.

STEPHEN. What did you come down for?

CARRY. I don't know; I couldn't help it.

STEPHEN. What is that in your hand?

CARRY. In my hand? Nothing.

STEPHEN. What is it, Carry?

(*She has to show the keys; he takes them.*)

CARRY. Father!

STEPHEN. I see!

CARRY. I couldn't help it. What are you to do to me?

(*He takes her in his arms.*)

STEPHEN. Carry, you'll tell me the truth, won't you?

CARRY (*a child again*). Yes.

STEPHEN. Has this ever happened before?

CARRY. No.

STEPHEN. That night you—said you came down for a book for your mother?

CARRY. That once—only that once.

STEPHEN. Your headaches—was that what they meant?

CARRY. No.

STEPHEN (*stroking her hair*). My little Carry, you used to come into my room, didn't you—while I was asleep—and get that key?

CARRY. Don't—don't!

STEPHEN. No, dear, I won't. Your mother—if she were to know!

CARRY (*simply*). Mother knows.

STEPHEN. What?

CARRY. That is why I sleep in her room. Father, I didn't mean to come to-night. But all at once—it—it came over me.

STEPHEN (*listening to his own phrases*). Came over you!

CARRY. I held my breath till she was asleep, and then—then—I don't know how I can be your daughter.

(*He shudders.*)

Here is mother.

(MRS. BRAND *in a wrapper appears with a candle, which lights the room a little more.*)

STEPHEN. Agnes, Agnes!

MRS. BRAND (*quietly*). So you know now, Stephen.

STEPHEN. I know now.

(*She puts down the candle.*)

Why did you keep it from me?

CARRY. Mother said it would be so awful to you to know.

STEPHEN. Not more awful than to you, Agnes.

CARRY. She said you have always been so good all your life.

STEPHEN. You said that, Agnes?

MRS. BRAND. Yes.

STEPHEN (*overcome*). To have kept it from me—and to have given her such a reason—the love of woman!

MRS. BRAND (*still quietly*). 'The love of woman!' You think it was my love for you that made me spare you?

STEPHEN. What else?

MRS. BRAND. When after I married you I found out what you were, I—yes, the love of woman still made me forgive you, pity you, try to help you. But from the day when I discovered what legacy you had given my child —the love of woman changed into something harsher.

CARRY (*bewildered*). Legacy?

MRS. BRAND. She doesn't know what I mean. The only reason I haven't told her is that I believed she might be able to fight it better if she thought the blame was hers.

STEPHEN. She must know now. Carry, what your mother means—and it is all true—is that for many years I was as you are, but a hundred times worse.

CARRY (*unable to grasp it*). You, father—not you—oh no.

STEPHEN. Yes. And what your mother means is that you get it from me; can that be possible!

MRS. BRAND. That is the only way I can reason it out.

CARRY (*clinging to* MRS. BRAND). Mother!

MRS. BRAND. You are not to blame, my own; he never gave you a chance. I have no pity left for you, Stephen; it has all gone to her.

STEPHEN. Let her have every drop of it.

CARRY. Father, do you think there is any hope?

STEPHEN (*cheered*). Hope? Of course there is. Carry, *I* fought it long ago, and beat it.

CARRY (*wondering*). Are you sure?

STEPHEN. Your mother knows. Many times I failed, but at last I won. And listen to this, in the end I found it almost easy.

CARRY (*wondering still more*). Easy?

MRS. BRAND. So easy that you were sometimes puzzled, Stephen, just as you see it puzzles Carry now.

STEPHEN. Yes; I suppose it was my doggedness.

MRS. BRAND. Oh, Stephen!

CARRY. I don't see how it can have been easy.

MRS. BRAND. It was easy, Carry, because he didn't do it.

STEPHEN. Agnes!

MRS. BRAND. He thinks he did.

STEPHEN. Haven't I given it up?

MRS. BRAND. Not as I have thought the thing out, Stephen. I don't think you gave it up—I think it gave up you. I was looking on; I saw. It wearied of you, and left you. But it has come back now—for her. Easy enough to find a way back to the house—for such an old friend of yours. I may be wrong, but that is what I make of it.

CARRY. There is Dick—there is Dick.

STEPHEN. Dick, yes. Isn't it a shame, Agnes, to keep this from him?

MRS. BRAND. A shame? Of course it is a shame. But it is her best chance, and I won't let it go.

CARRY. Mother, I want Dick to know.

MRS. BRAND. If all isn't well, dear, in a year's time he shall be told. That is why I said that the engagement must last a year. As for hope, my own, of course there is hope. It is just an ailment you have caught.

CARRY. Please always watch me. But do you think it will be any use? I feel I shall be

watching you, and sometimes you will tire, but will I ever tire?

MRS. BRAND. You will tire before I do. Stephen, you will help us, won't you?

STEPHEN. I'll try.

CARRY (*stroking his arm*). Poor Carry, but poor father too.

MAR 1 1984